

Sentence-Composing Tools: Adjective Clause

DEFINITION

A dependent clause that describes a person, place, or thing. Like all clauses, adjective clauses contain a subject and its verb.

Adjective clauses are descriptive attachments to independent clauses and are, therefore, dependent clauses. They usually begin with one of these words: *who*, *which*, *whose*. They answer these questions:

What did the person, place, or thing do? (*who*, *which*)

What did the person, place, or thing have? (*whose*)

Who: The twins, **who had finished their homework**, were allowed to watch half an hour of TV.

Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

Which: The man on the loudspeaker begins calling everyone over to the track for the first event, **which is the 20-yard dash**.

Toni Cade Bambara, "Raymond's Run"

Whose: Little Jon, **whose eyes were quicker than most**, should have seen the hole, but all his attention was on the stars.

Alexander Key, *The Forgotten Door*

Two Positions for Adjective Clauses:

S-V split (between a subject and its verb): Miss Fleetie Breathitt, **who was the principal of our school as well as my teacher and sometimes Romey's**, said she was glad to see us again.

Bill and Vera Cleaver, *Where the Lilies Bloom*

Closer (after a subject and its verb): The first thing they saw was Peeves the Poltergeist, **who was floating upside down in midair and stuffing the nearest keyhole with chewing gum**.

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

Nonrestrictive vs. Restrictive Adjective Clauses:

Nonrestrictive (Describes a person, place, or thing, and is punctuated with commas): His black hair, which had been combed wet earlier in the day, was dry now and blowing.

J. D. Salinger, "The Laughing Man"

The nonrestrictive adjective clause doesn't identify the black hair; it describes it. Because there are pauses before and after "which had been combed wet earlier in the day," two commas are needed.

Restrictive (Identifies a person, place, or thing and is not punctuated with commas): Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years.

William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily"

The restrictive adjective clause identifies the specific room. What room? The one "which no one had seen in forty years." Because there is no pause, a comma is not needed.

In this section, only nonrestrictive adjective clauses are practiced as they are the kind that add descriptive detail to your writing.

Note: Adjective clauses are set in **boldface**, and independent clauses are underlined.

Single Adjective Clauses:

1. Mr. McAlester, who kept the store, was a good Arkansas man.

Charles Portis, *True Grit*

2. The great coon dog, whose rhythmic panting came through the porch floor, came from under the house and began to whine.

William H. Armstrong, *Souder*

3. He had a permanent case of sun itch, which he scratched continually without adding anything to his negligible beauty.

Robert Heinlein, *The Green Hills of Earth*

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

Multiple Adjective Clauses:

4. In his room on the ground floor, Father Kleinsorge changed into a military uniform. which he had acquired when he was teaching at the Rokko Middle School in Kobe and which he wore during air-raid alerts.

John Hersey, *Hiroshima*

5. She failed to see a shadow, which followed her like her own shadow, which stopped when she stopped, and which started again when she did.

Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera*

6. These are men of chemistry, who spray the trees against pests, who sulfur the grapes, who cut out diseases and rots, mildews and sicknesses.

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

PRACTICE 1: MATCHING

Match the adjective clauses with the sentences. Write out each sentence, inserting the adjective clauses at the caret (^) and underlining them.

Sentences:

1. All the eyes of Paris were fixed on the Eiffel Tower, ^.

Chris Van Allsburg, *The Sweetest Fig*

2. My hands were wrapped in an old towel, ^.

Richard Kim, *Lost Names*

3. She also had to watch our three chickens, ^.

Laurence Yep, *Dragonwings*

4. One guy, ^, tried to rise but could not.

Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*

5. Behind her in the shadows, he could see the little boy, ^.

Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

Adjective Clauses:

- a. which I also used to wipe the sweat from my face

- b. whose wounds were so dreadful that he more resembled meat than man

- c. who must have been about his own age

- d. which slowly drooped over as if it were made of soft rubber

- e. who loved to wander away from our farm